



George  
**LeMieux**  
U.S. Senator *for* Florida

## E- NEWSLETTER

February 24, 2010

**It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your United States Senator. Thank you for subscribing to my weekly email update - a brief summary of some of the more notable events during the last seven days. I hope you'll find this useful and informative. You can also follow my regular updates via YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.**



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### **President Obama's Deficit Commission**

Our nation's tremendous and growing debt is a huge problem and we need to address it immediately. The President recently brought up the issue with the creation of a "deficit commission." Unfortunately, this is a band-aid approach to the problem because it does not force Congress to do anything.

If Washington truly wanted to address the problem, Congress and the President would freeze federal spending at 2007 levels as I have proposed; that would achieve budget surpluses by 2013 and cut the national debt in half by 2020. We should also eliminate waste, fraud and abuse, eliminate earmarks, and cut duplicative government programs. To read more about my proposal, click here for an article written by the executive editor of The Weekly Standard, Fred Barnes <http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/2007-solution> -solution

America's taxpaying families currently pay more than \$200 billion a year in interest on our \$12 trillion dollar debt. If we don't act soon, that amount will double, then double again in a relatively short period of time. The sooner we stop spending our children and grandchildren's money, the sooner we will put America back on the track toward prosperity.

## **Florida and Latin America**

More than any other state in the nation, Florida depends on a healthy and vibrant relationship with the countries of Latin America. Relationships like these are important to our economy because they create jobs here at home. As the "Gateway to the Americas," Florida is the beneficiary of tens of thousands of jobs related to the trade of goods and services. Close ties with other countries in the hemisphere also create and maintain partnerships in the fight against terrorism. That is why I held meetings with officials from some of our partner countries last week.

## **Honduras**



In recent months, Honduras has established a new government returning democracy and the rule of law to its people. I met with Honduras President Porfirio Lobo and congratulated him for the steps he has taken. Because Florida has many important ties to Honduras and Latin America, I invited President Lobo to our state to meet with business leaders in Miami to foster new

President Lobo at the White House to show our full support for his administration. Quickly restoring all diplomatic arrangements with Honduras will encourage our allies to do the same and help that nation build a strong democratic future.

## **Panama**

In Panama, I met with government officials to discuss the importance of international trade to Florida's economy and the need for Washington to act on several pending trade promotion agreements. Trade with Latin American countries is a job creator in Florida. Florida's merchandise exports to Latin America and the Caribbean amounted to more than \$51 billion in 2008. Florida's increased services exports to Panama could sustain an additional 900 jobs in the first year of such an agreement, rising to more than 4,000 jobs by the fifth year. That is why it is important President Obama send Congress the U.S. Panama Trade Promotion Agreement so we can create even more jobs in Florida and across the United States. The sooner Washington acts on the pending trade agreements, the sooner we will add jobs to Florida's economy.



I also received a briefing on the status of the Panama Canal expansion project which is on track for completion in 2014. This is critically important to Florida because the wider canal will allow the world's largest container ships to come from Asia directly into Florida's deepwater ports. China and other vibrant Asian economies are looking for alternatives to West Coast ports to unload goods; Florida stands to gain the most by the Panama Canal expansion, and we must be ready.

## Colombia



Colombia is one of our closest allies in the Western Hemisphere and it is a critical trading partner. During my meeting with Colombia President Alvaro Uribe, we talked about ways we can expand our already vibrant trading relationship. In 2008, Colombia ranked the third highest importer of Florida goods where trade amounted to more than \$4 billion.

Right now, we are at a competitive disadvantage and potentially losing business to other countries because the U.S. Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement has yet to be approved. With 14 deepwater ports, Florida is heavily dependent on healthy trading relationships and approving this agreement will create jobs in our state.



The Colombian government is also a strategic partner in the fight against narco-terrorism. To this day, the Colombian government remains at war with drug producers, guerillas and militias who will stop at nothing to continue shipping illicit narcotics to the United States. I discussed with President Uribe the ongoing counternarcotics cooperation between our two countries and offered to convey requests for additional assistance to Washington. This partnership must continue and be fully supported by Congress to keep the Americas safe and secure.

## Haiti



On Friday, February 12, I traveled to Haiti as part of the first official U.S. congressional delegation. Our purpose was to oversee ongoing U.S. participation in the recovery efforts and identify steps to help Haiti rebuild what it lost.

Following the trip, I authored a bipartisan letter to President Obama encouraging continued and well-structured support. We need to focus on immediate relief, but given the massive devastation and the tremendous outpouring of international assistance, the Haitian people will benefit from a long-term plan for rebuilding. This plan needs to include measurable goals to ensure that any assistance the U.S. sends to Haiti is successfully used to rebuild a stronger nation. You can read a copy of the letter to President Obama by clicking here. [http://lemieux.senate.gov/public/?a=Files.Serve&File\\_id=d23413da-ab3!0-43b8-938b-64e96a41cc2f](http://lemieux.senate.gov/public/?a=Files.Serve&File_id=d23413da-ab3!0-43b8-938b-64e96a41cc2f)

## **Casework Corner**

One of my primary goals is to make sure Floridians are well served by Federal agencies. From time to time, I will share accounts of how our office has helped a Floridian.

An 82-year-old World War II veteran who had served in both the U.S. Merchant Marines and the U.S. Navy recently applied for a hearing aid at a South Florida Veterans Affairs facility. The veteran's hearing had eroded over time due to "continued traumatic acoustic exposure" related to gunnery training and being in charge of the gunnery department aboard an attack cargo ship. The veteran's claim for a hearing aid was denied.

The veteran contacted our office for assistance. Under a new VA policy, the veteran's claim should have been granted. Our office resubmitted the claim on behalf of the veteran with information about the new policy. The veteran's hearing aid claim was reviewed and approved.

If you are experiencing a problem with a federal agency, please contact our Orlan! do Regional Office by calling (407) 254-2573 to speak with a member of the Casework Department. The toll-free number for Florida residents is (866) 630-7106. To find out more about how my office can help you, go to <http://lemieux.senate.gov> or stop by one of our scheduled Community Office Hours in your area.

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